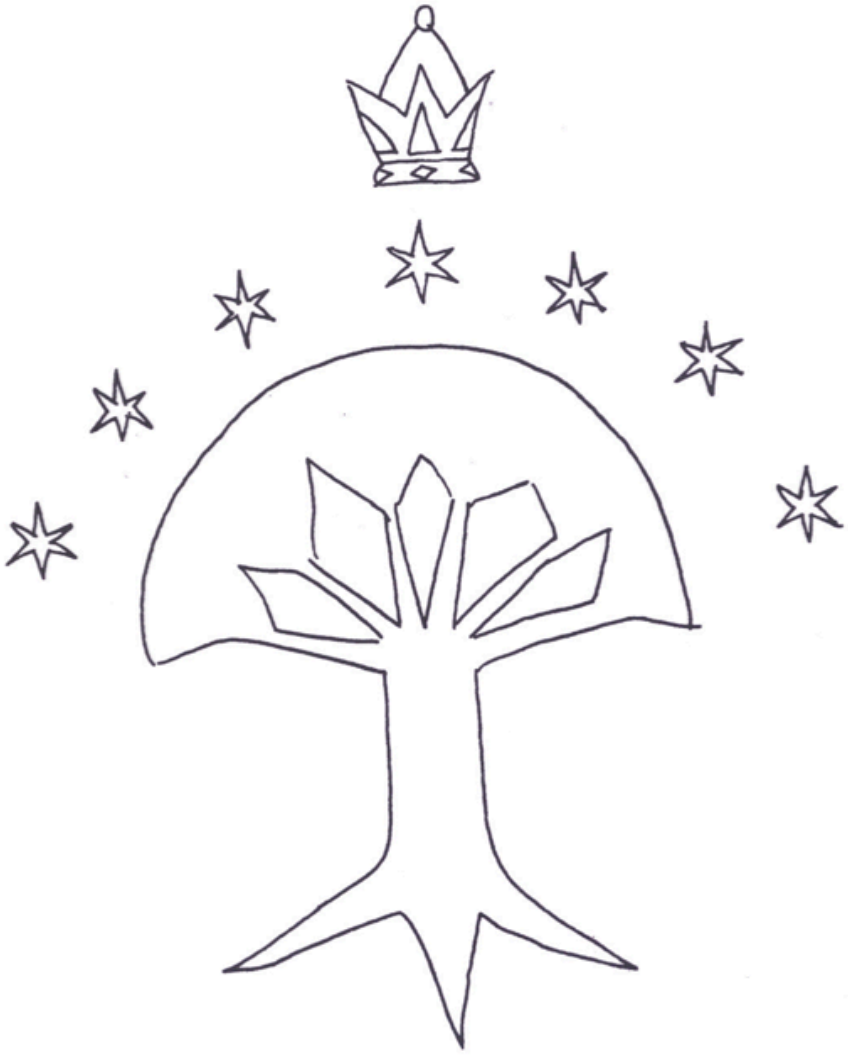
— the mirkwood — tales



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by Eric S. Roberts

Foreword

Dungeons and Dragons is not really a game. Its players are not players in the classical sense but are instead participants in the ways of a strange and exciting world. To become a part of the Mirkwood Tales demands more than a love for games; it requires a will to be part of an adventure and the imagination to make that adventure real.

The Mirkwood Tales are stories from the time of Middle Earth. We will tell them together, and, like the greatest of tales, they will grow in the telling and become as real as any legend of that time. I hope that this manual will serve as a guide for players who wish to join in the tales. The rules and guidelines in the sections that follow are not designed to limit our freedom as we assume our Middle Earth identities but to provide a basis for the telling of the tales.

To tell the Mirkwood Tales, we must become part of Middle Earth and its history. Simply reading the legends is not the same as knowing them. If you cannot picture Frodo as he carries the One Ring to the Crack of Doom, if you would not follow Aragorn along the Paths of the Dead, if your soul is not touched by the beauty of Lothlorien—the Mirkwood Tales will then have little meaning. If, however, you would recognize Gandalf at a distance, if your mind reels with wonder at the thought of mithril or the Arkenstone, if your soul is at home in Middle Earth—read on and welcome to the Mirkwood Tales.

Acknowledgments

I've always been rather skeptical of long acknowledgments in which a writer professes his indebtedness to what seems like half the world, and it feels a little strange to be in that position. By their very nature, however, the Mirkwood Tales represent the product of a group effort in which many people have played a part. In appreciation for all of the work that has gone into the design of the Mirkwood Tales, I would like to dedicate this guide to all of those individuals who have made the Tales come alive.

To E. Gary Gygax, Dave Arneson, Bob Kuntz, Jim Ward, and all the others at Tactical Studies Rules for all the groundwork and design behind Dungeons and Dragons and for their understanding of the spirit of adventure.

To J. R. R. Tolkien for making Middle Earth so real.

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Chapter 1
Introduction

1.1 On Dungeons and Dragons

For the most part, the Mirkwood Tales have grown out of the realm of fantasy games and Dungeons and Dragons in particular. At the same time, the Mirkwood Tales are only distantly related to Dungeons and Dragons as described by Tactical Studies Rules. The similarity is to the philosophy of Dungeons and Dragons rather than to its detail—to the spirit of cooperative adventure that sets Dungeons and Dragons apart from conventional games.

To become great, a game must capture the soul of its players as well as their minds by demanding imagination as well as strategy. Games such as chess or Go capture the mind but lack the realism that allows the soul to become involved in the action. As much as one becomes entranced with the game, one cannot become a small black stone or see one's identity merge with that of the pawn on K4. To capture the soul, a game must move away from the abstraction and symbolism that characterize most games and reduce their vitality.

Historically, most of the games which have sought to achieve such realism have been conceived as war games that draw upon military campaigns for their setting and detail. For the most part, these are real enough—too real, perhaps, in some ways. War games have three basic failings as settings for games of imagination. First, wars are relatively unimaginative. The cleverness of past campaigns has been strongly limited by the cleverness of the military mind, and the setting rarely provides much opportunity for initiative or creativity. Furthermore, war is decidedly unpleasant. It is not hard to believe that wars might provide a setting in which we can *imagine* participating; it is much more difficult to conceive of a setting in which we would *want* to participate. Finally, there is a basic paradox in a game of war that works against the realism that it seeks to convey. Two players, presumably friends, meet and begin a game in which they take on the roles of armies, presumably enemies, in combat. Although it is possible for players to identify with their own characters, they cannot identify with the enemy's characters because the relationship between participants is so different in the two planes.

In the development of Dungeons and Dragons from more conventional war games, each of these problems has been solved. Changing the setting from that of history to that of fantasy shifts the entire focus of the campaign from the mundane to the imaginative. Particularly in a more imaginative setting, the emphasis can be shifted from conflict to adventure; there is at least as much excitement in fighting a dragon as in fighting a war. Finally, while it takes at least two sides to have a war, everyone fighting the dragon is probably on the same side, and cooperation can replace competition between the players. The experience, all in all, seems much better for the soul.

Although the approach of the Mirkwood Tales seems ideal in theory, it requires a fair amount of work in practice. Unless the setting is sufficiently detailed and familiar that

the participants can believe in it, fanciful settings may lose some of the realism that was part of the original goal. Compared with conflict, adventure is much more complicated and unpredictable. Giving up on competition has the very real danger of sacrificing challenge as well. In order to remain challenging, the game must involve adversity; the problems must not be easy. In order to make the dragon a match for the players, it must have more than strength and mechanical powers. The dragon must match wits and strategy against the players and must therefore be guided by someone with the required wit and strategy.

The key to Dungeons and Dragons is that the spirit behind the dragon is not a player in the game. The players all stand together as they come to grips with the forces of the universe. The dragon is part of that universe, and like all things within that universe, good and bad, the dragon is controlled by the designer of the world who acts not as a player, but as a referee in a game of imagination and adventure. The referee sets forth the beginning of each legend, gives out all the new information as the epic unfolds, controls the characters in the story that the players encounter, and manages the workings of the world. And yet, the referee is not the actor in the story. The referee sets the scene, but the players independently determine the course that events will take.

1.2 On Middle Earth

In many ways, Tolkien's world of Middle Earth forms an ideal setting for Dungeons and Dragons or any game that is centered on the spirit of adventure. The world described in *The Hobbit, The Lord of the Rings,* and the associated legends is so detailed and so consistent that it becomes real to its readers. Each legend is not designed as a separate story, but as part of the history of Middle Earth and the Elder Days.

The advantage of using Tolkien's world is that many share an understanding of it and are prepared for its adventures. The Mirkwood Tales build on the charm and vitality of Middle Earth to create new tales that are equally familiar and alive.

The philosophy of the Mirkwood Tales seems well suited to Tolkien's world. Middle Earth is centered around tales of adventure and challenge. Such challenge appears to be the essence of the world, for, in its absence, the world loses not only its excitement, but much of its color and beauty. The Third Age ends with the downfall of Sauron and his evil, and the Wise know that "when the One has gone, the Three will fail, and many fair things will fade and be forgotten." Even though much of the evil of the world ends with the passing of Sauron, so does much of the challenge that has kept it alive. The sense of adventure also provides life to the Mirkwood Tales, which also depend on adversity to create excitement and a spirit of cooperation among the players.

Furthermore, the Mirkwood Tales depend on a balance of free will and predestination that seems at home in Middle Earth. Throughout the story of the Ring, fate issues challenges to individuals who must then attempt to meet those challenges. Gandalf notes that "Bilbo was meant to find the Ring, and not by its maker." Bilbo is chosen for his role, as are most characters in the tale, but is responsible for his own actions. Bilbo, Frodo, Gandalf, Galadriel, and Faramir all face the challenge and pass the test of the Ring. Yet Boromir, Denethor, and Saruman each fall prey to the power of the Ring and perish in their pursuit of it.

This balance of destiny and will is the essence of the Mirkwood Tales. The referee invents the challenges and problems of the story, but the solution to those problems is not in the referee's hands. The characters must meet the challenges in their own way and complete the story through their own creativity and free will.

Chapter 2
Getting Started

2.1 The Role of the Referee

Although the preceding chapter gives some background into the philosophy of the Mirkwood Tales, it gives no clear insight into the actual workings of the game and leaves many questions unanswered. How is it possible to set up a game based on adventure and cooperation that retains its excitement and challenge? How does one build new legends from the time of Middle Earth that fit into Tolkien's world? How does one begin a new adventure that becomes a part of the Mirkwood Tales?

An episode from the Mirkwood Tales begins long before the players in the game make their first expedition into the underground world of adventure. For weeks or months, the adventure is just a developing idea as the referee imagines unexplored lands, dangerous enemies, and challenging situations. Working from this base, the referee must add depth and detail until the vague conception grows into the rough beginnings of a legend. In the process, the referee will draw maps of ancient caverns, litter those caverns with treasure and deadly traps, invent hostile creatures to inhabit the chambers, and design problems which will capture the imagination of those who will one day encounter them in the dark subterranean ways.

Initially, the referee might begin by choosing a setting for the adventure. For example, the referee might think about the unexplored paths from the Lord of the Rings and try to build simple legends around them. What dark and evil creatures live in the depths of Khazad-Dum where "the world is gnawed by nameless things"? What stands beyond the stony door in the Paths of the Dead where Aragorn wonders about "the whispering darkness behind"? And what is the special beauty of the Glittering Caves and the "immeasurable halls filled with an everlasting music" that so captures Gimli's soul.

As an example, suppose that the referee decides to build a story around the Glittering Caves with their unknown treasures and dangers. The referee must then decide when the story takes place, draw maps of the caves, and build the entire setting for the story. Finally, the referee must invent a beginning for a tale that sets forth some problem for the expeditionary force that will soon make its way into the imaginary realm. Perhaps there are tales of a great storehouse of gold to find or a dragon to be slain. Here, the referee decides that a large party of dwarves has been lost in a previously unexplored region of the Glittering Caves for whom the new expedition must search, discovering treasure and fighting against danger along the way.

When the design work is complete, the referee describes the basic setting of the story to the players. Most of the referee's work remains secret at this point. The players know only a small part of the historical background of the legend; the maps, the monsters, and the treasure will lie hidden until the party encounters them later on.

At this point, the players begin to use their own imagination as they design their roles for the coming expedition. Each player chooses a name, decides whether to concentrate on magical arts or on combat skills, and invents an entire personal history to suit the newly created character. Throughout the expedition, each player will assume the role of the character and be bound by the strengths and limitations of that character. The characters form the link between the world of the players and the world of legend. The legend progresses through the actions of the characters—actions that are directed by the individual players.

After the character roles are chosen and the opening legends described, the actual play of the Mirkwood Tales begins. On the whole, the manner of "play" in the Mirkwood Tales is somewhat difficult to describe, since it is not really governed by rules in the manner of traditional games. The game proceeds largely as an exercise in cooperative storytelling. The referee describes the world at each point and then lets the characters consider their course of action. The players then announce what they intend to do (either jointly or individually) and the referee then determines the effect of those actions on the course of the unfolding legend.

Although it is not easy to describe the spirit of the Mirkwood Tales, the typical mode of play is easily illustrated by example. The remainder of this chapter describes the beginning of a sample adventure. In the pages that follow, imagine that you have taken the part of one of the characters in the expedition and that you must face the same decisions as you begin your journey into the Glittering Caves.

2.2 An Adventure in the Glittering Caves

The sun is just rising on a day in late autumn as a young dwarf, dressed in mail, makes his way toward a small group of adventurers gathered on the hillside. As he climbs, he watches as the morning light falls upon the ramparts of Helm's Dike towering above the hill. For a moment, he stops and imagines his grandfather defending those walls from the orcs who had once filled this valley long ago. For the dwarf is Farin—grandson of Gimli the Elf-friend, Lord of the Glittering Caves.

Farin, along with the company of adventurers he joins, is sitting comfortably on the floor preparing to become a part of the Mirkwood Tales. The rising sun, the hills and the fortress are before him in his mind as he listens to the referee describe the scene. Earlier, the referee had outlined the events leading up to this moment. The year is 136 in the Fourth Age, and sixteen years have passed since Gimli sailed with Legolas across the Sea. With his passing, Farin's father Dwarin had become Lord of the Glittering Caves, and the dwarves in Helm's Deep continued to expand their caverns "with cautious skill, tap by tap, to open new ways and display far chambers that are still dark, glimpsed only as a void beyond fissures in the rock."

It was a little more than one month ago that the dwarves discovered the door in the northern cave. The door was old and was labeled with dwarf letters of a long forgotten time, but the words were clear:

> Behold the Door to the Vault of Khazin, Lord of the Caves. Seek not to force this Door, for it is sealed with the power of the sun and the moon.

For some time, the dwarves wondered at the words as they tried to open the ancient Door. Yet the Door seemed immune to force and the hammers of the dwarves were broken by the surrounding stone. Even so, the dwarves continued to chisel at the rock, ever driven by the vision of treasure in the vault beyond. Their work continued well into the night, but the nearly full moon shone into the cavern for several hours of the evening casting a soft and eerie light upon the Door.

On the morning of the third day, as the dwarves entered the cave to resume their labors, the Door stood open in the morning sun. After wedging the door with stakes and boulders, Dwarin and a small company of dwarves entered the passage beyond to explore the great Vault of Khazin. Nothing was heard from them for the rest of that day or on any day thereafter, for at sunset, the Door swung shut, breaking stakes and dislodging boulders in its path.

It was one of the elves in Fangorn who first suggested an interpretation for the message on the Door. As Dwarin and his companions labored in the cave on the night before they entered the vault, none of them had time to notice the beauty of the full moon as it rose above the eastern hills. But the great Door, "sealed with the power of the sun and the moon," watched the rising of that moon as it had watched the full moon for years beyond count. And in the morning, as the sun rose in the place of the moon, the Door swung open. Last night, Farin had stood at the Door and watched the full moon again rise over the hills, anxiously awaiting his own chance to follow his father into the Vault of Khazin.

The referee has just finished the tale, and Farin looks around at the other members of the company that have joined him in the room. Two younger dwarves, Darvi and Narvi, had been his friends for years, and the three had often shared in smaller explorations and adventures. Darvi had learned to wield his axe from Gimli himself, and Farin knew no other dwarf who could match Darvi's skill in battle. Narvi, on the other hand, had turned his skill toward working in the caves and was a great craftsman in stone. On top of this, Narvi generally seemed to be able to open doors or to find concealed passages. Farin had never understood this talent and thought Narvi was often just lucky, but he was always happy to have Narvi along.

The elves in Fangorn were represented by Eldoras who had spent much of his youth with Legolas and was well known to the dwarves. After Legolas passed over the Sea, Eldoras returned to Fangorn to study magic with some of the older elves and was beginning to gain mastery of the simpler spells. King Elfwine the Fair had sent Fredor, a young warrior from Rohan, as a representative of men. Each year, Farin and his father had journeyed to Rohan to celebrate the beginning of the year and mark the passing of Sauron years ago. In those visits, Farin had become good friends with Fredor and welcomed his company.

Only the sixth member of the party was a stranger to Farin. Goldinor was his name, and he had ridden from Imladris to join the expedition. Eldoras had told Farin that Goldinor was quite skilled in the arts of healing and knew much about the legends of the Elder

Days. Farin hoped that Goldinor would tell him the legends of the Vault of Khazin and of the unbounded riches he was sure it contained, but if Goldinor knew of these legends, he was keeping them secret for the time.

Once again, Farin looks up and listens to the words of the referee. For the last few minutes, the referee has been describing their approach to the mouth of the cave. Farin volunteers to be the first to look into the cave and ask about the great Door. The referee pauses and then answers:

"The Door stands open."

2.3 In the Vault of Khazin

From this moment, the story of the Mirkwood Tales is told as a conversation between the referee and the members of the party. As the expedition wanders through the passages beyond the great Door, the referee acts as the party's eyes and ears and describes each new scene. The members of the party, acting on that vision of the world, describe their individual actions as the legend unfolds.

Referee: The Door stands open. Beyond the Door, there is a narrow dark passage that leads straight back into the earth.

Farin: Are there any signs near the Door that Dwarin may have returned to this spot after the Door closed?

Referee: There is nothing you can see from the mouth of the cave.

Narvi: Should I try to wedge the Door open again?

Farin: I doubt it would work, and it would probably take some time. We should just make sure we're out by sunset. I'm going to go in just beyond the Door and look around with a torch. What do I see?

Referee: As you enter the passage, you notice that the air is somewhat foul with the odor of decaying flesh somewhere within. Just inside, there is a chisel lying on the floor. Beside the chisel, a large gemstone sparkles in the torchlight.

Farin: I pick up the jewel and take it outside.

Referee: As you turn around, you notice that letters have, been chipped in the wall just above the Door. It is a message from Darzi, one of the dwarves from Dwarin's party:

> We are trapped within the Vault of Khazin, but we do not despair, for there is ample water below and treasure enough for any dwarf. Food is short, but we can survive on orc flesh if we find no better. We shall mark our trail for those that follow.
>
> Darzi

When you step outside the cave into the sunlight, you find that the gemstone, although it sparkles much like any crystal, is not particularly beautiful, and it has not been cut or polished.

Narvi: Is there anything unusual about it?

Referee: It is irregular in shape and is quite sharp along one edge.

Narvi: I try to use it as a knife. Does it cut my sleeve, for example?

Referee: Seems to work pretty well as a knife.

Narvi: Good, I'll take it along. *

Farin: Let's all go in. How far can we see down the passage?

Referee: The passage goes straight back into the rock and seems to slope down slightly. The passage has been carefully constructed and the walls are not at all rough. There is some sunlight filtering into the passage, but you cannot see more than about fifty feet down the corridor. In that distance, there appear to be no branches or side paths.

Farin: We light our torches and start walking down the passage.

Referee: As you enter the passage, you are heading almost due west. For the first fifty feet, you notice nothing unusual and the passage continues straight ahead. At that point, the floor of the passage appears to level off slightly, so that no light from the entrance reaches the passage ahead.

Farin: Do we see anything ahead of us?

Referee: The passage continues west.

Farin: We'll follow it.

Referee: After walking about twenty more feet, you notice that there is a corridor off to the north some twenty feet ahead of you, although the main passage continues west.

Farin: We go up to the intersection and carefully look into the northern corridor. What do we see?

Referee: To the north, the passage slants downward rapidly, but you cannot see any great distance down the passage. The northern passage is considerably more narrow than the passage you are now in and the walls are more roughly carved into the stone. Eldoras thinks that he heard something move down the corridor, but is not sure of it.

Eldoras: What did I hear?

Referee: It sounded like footsteps running somewhere down the corridor.

Farin: What do we see ahead to the west?

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* At this point, the party has missed its first clue. Narvi has a knife, but he has missed its full potential. Upon further investigation, they might have noticed that the dwarf chisel was blunt and chipped and that the writing in the stone face had been carved with the crystal.

Referee: Just ahead, off to the side of the passage, there is a small cairn composed of three rocks forming a small tower and a smaller rock to the western side. Other than that, you can see nothing but a straight passage ahead of you.

Farin: It looks like Dwarin continued west here—we'll follow.

Referee: After walking forty feet past the intersection, you see the end of the corridor ahead of you, about thirty feet ahead. The passage ends at a large door, but from this distance you can make out no detail. A dark shape seems to be huddled on the floor just before the door, silent and unmoving.

Referee: Not from here.

Fredor: Can we tell what it is?

Darvi: Maybe a couple of us should go ahead and investigate.

Farin: We might as well stick together at this point. If something attacks, we should probably all be there. We all approach the end of the corridor cautiously until we can see whatever is by the door more clearly.

Referee: As you approach, it becomes clear that the huddled figure is a lifeless body from which the shafts of several arrows still protrude.

Farin: Does there seem to be anything else around?

Referee: No.

Farin: We go up and examine the body. Do we recognize it?

Referee: Perhaps. The body is clearly that of a dwarf, but you do not recognize it immediately. All of the mail and weapons have been taken from the body, and the middle finger on the right hand has been cut off. Narvi remembers that Darzi wore a ring of gold and sapphire on his middle finger, and believes that this is Darzi's body, mutilated by a band of orcs.

Narvi: Do we notice anything else?

Referee: Above the body, set into the western wall beside the door at the end of the passage, there is a small cache protected by a heavy metal panel that now stands open. The metal panel and the inner walls of the cache appear to glow faintly in the darkness as if from hidden magic. Carved in the stone above the panel, you read:

The Key to the Vault of Khazin.
Disturb it not.
The Key belongs to Dwarves alone.

Narvi: You said the metal panel was open. Is there a key inside the cache?

Referee: No, the cache is empty.

Narvi: I shut the metal door.

Referee: OK.

Narvi: Can I open it again?

Referee: Yes.

Narvi: Is it still empty?

Referee: Yes.

Narvi: I close it again, and let Eldoras try to open it. Does it open?

Referee: (To Eldoras) Do you want to try it? *

Eldoras: (Understanding Narvi's idea) Sure.

Referee: It won't open.

Narvi: I try the door at the end of the corridor. Does it open?

Referee: No, it appears to be locked.

Narvi: I think we're in trouble. Here's my theory about what happened here. When Dwarin and company returned to find that the great Door had shut, they must have headed back to the Vault, leaving Darzi behind to carve the message at the entrance. When Darzi made his way back to join the others, he was attacked (by orcs, it appears) just as he removed the key from this cache which only a dwarf seems able to open. It looks like the orcs managed to get the key as well.

Fredor: Then why didn't the orcs head through the vault door, and why didn't Dwarin and the other dwarves return to look for Darzi?

Narvi: I don't know, but we'll probably find out before too long. I'm going to try to pick at the lock on the door.

Fredor: Maybe we should go back and look at the other passage.

Goldinor: I think we ought to bury Darzi's body and set a marker in his memory.

Darvi: It would take forever to dig in this rock.

Goldinor: We can't be more than 200 feet from the entrance. It should be easy to take him outside and bury him there.

Darvi: We can do that on our way out.

Goldinor: I am glad that your heart is ever able to remain so light, but I am not so sure of our success. None of us know what lies ahead, and I imagine that there may be no return trip for most of us. It will take little time to carry Darzi back to the surface so that others, at least, will set him to rest.

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* Note that the actions taken are individual. Narvi is not allowed to take an action for Eldoras, although he can suggest one.

Referee: As you talk, an arrow whistles down the corridor and strikes harmlessly against the door. Another follows, but it bounces harmlessly from Darvi's coat of mail.

Farin: We all turn and try to see who shot the arrows.

Referee: You can see nothing up the corridor, but you hear the sound of footsteps echoing in the darkness.

Farin: Let's follow them. We'll go back to the intersection. Do we see anything?

Referee: You reach the intersection without seeing any signs of your attackers.

Farin: They must have headed down the northern passage. I peek around the corner. Do I see anything?

Referee: As you look around the corner, an arrow narrowly misses the side of your head. Down the passage, you catch a glimpse of a figure running away in the shadows.

Farin: We all head down the corridor.

Referee: The passage slopes very steeply here, probably about thirty degrees from the horizontal. Ahead, you hear occasional sounds of rocks shifting, although you can see no one.

Farin: We keep going.

Referee: You are now about fifty feet from the intersection, and the passage continues to slope downward with no end in sight. At various points along the passage, there is some water seeping through the roof of the passage that runs down the walls and trickles along the edge of the floor. After you proceed about ten additional feet, you hear a splash ahead of you, followed by repeated splashes for a time, and then all is again quiet.

Farin: We head toward the sound.

Referee: As you walk on, you notice that the passage levels out approximately forty feet from where you heard the noise. A pool of water covers the floor of the passage at that point.

Farin: We walk up to the pool. Is it deep?

Referee: At the edge, it appears to be about a foot deep. Ahead of you the passage proceeds straight and climbs out of the pool about thirty feet ahead.

Farin: Let's cross.

Goldinor: As we walk, I check the floor of the cavern with my staff to make sure there are no hidden pits.

Referee: There seem to be none, and you make it across the pool. From the opposite side, you can see that the corridor continues north for thirty additional feet and joins an east/west passage.

Eldoras: I examine the floor for wet footprints.

Referee: There are two sets of prints leading onward. Furthermore, whatever made the tracks was bow-legged and wore heavy shoes.

Darvi: It has to be orcs. Let's get them.

Farin: We go up to the intersection, but we don't enter it yet. Can we hear anything in either direction?

Referee: No, everything is quiet.

Eldoras: Are there still wet footprints?

Referee: Yes, they lead east.

Farin: I take off my helmet and use my sword to hold the helmet out in the passage as if I were looking around. Any more arrows this time?

Referee: Two arrows fly at the helmet, one of which bounces off the side of the helmet and the other passes underneath.

Farin: We all rush out quickly before they have a chance to draw new arrows.

Referee: As you look east, you see a pair of orcs, about twenty feet away, standing before the open doorway of some room. Each orc is carrying a short bow and a quiver of arrows. In addition, one orc is wearing a short sword and the other has a heavy wooden cudgel at his waist. As you jump into the corridor, the orcs turn and run toward the door.

Fredor: I shoot an arrow. *

Darvi: I run after the other one.

Referee: (after rolling dice to determine the arrow's accuracy) The arrow hits the orc carrying the short sword and appears to wound him seriously, for he staggers and falls.

Farin: I shoot an arrow.

Referee: Darvi's in the way. As Darvi approaches, the remaining orc draws his cudgel and raises it above his head. At that moment, another orc appears at the doorway, with a ready bow and fires a shot at Darvi. The shot hits Darvi in the leg, and he falls, nearly in front of the cudgel-bearing orc.

Eldoras: I cast a fire spell to ignite the club in his hand.

Narvi: And I rush for him with my sword.

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* Unlike most aspects of the Mirkwood Tales, hand-to-hand combat is governed by a set of relatively detailed rules. In each exchange, every individual gets one opportunity to attack in some way, and the two sides essentially take turns. The outcome of the individual attack sequences is determined through the use of random numbers and combat result tables. This is described in detail in the next chapter.

Farin: I shoot my arrow at the orc in the doorway.

Referee: The cudgel catches fire, and the orc drops it from his hands. Narvi attacks with his sword and the orc falls dead at his feet. Farin's bowshot goes wild and passes into the room ahead. The orc draws his sword and comes toward Narvi.

Fredor: I shoot an arrow.

Referee: It misses. The orc swings his sword at Narvi, but Narvi parries the blow.

Narvi: I swing at him.

Referee: You get him, and he falls to the ground.

Farin: We regroup and move toward the door to check if any more orcs are lurking beyond.

Goldinor: I'll stay with Darvi and see how badly he's hurt.

Referee: As you look inside the door, you see that the room is about thirty feet square and appears to be the lair for these orcs. The entire room is foul-smelling and littered with bones and debris. Other than that, the room seems empty and there are no more orcs.

Darvi is in great pain and is unable to rise, but is not critically wounded.

Goldinor: I use a spell of healing.

Referee: It appears to be working, and Darvi will probably be able to walk in fifteen minutes.

Farin: In the meantime, let's check the bodies of the orcs and look around the inside of their lair.

Referee: On the finger of one of the orcs, you find a gold and sapphire ring that Narvi recognizes to be the ring worn by Darzi. Other than the ring, you find only a few small trinkets of gold and silver, none of which appear to be of great value.

Farin: How about the weapons. Eldoras, can you tell if either of these swords is magical?

Eldoras: I haven't gotten to magic detection stuff yet. Seems like fire spells are all I can manage at the moment. *

Farin: We'll take the swords with us. Why don't we head back to the inner door.

Referee: Darvi is now able to stand, but he is unable to walk.

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* Users of magic, such as Eldoras and Goldinor, derive much of their power from the use of spells. At the beginning of an expedition, only a few spells are known. In time, however, the magically oriented characters learn new spells to increase their power.

Farin: We can carry him for a while. We'll head back along the same route until anything exceptional happens.

Referee: You're heading back through the south corridor toward the pool. You wade through the pool and are heading back toward the main corridor. You reach the main corridor, and turn west. As you pass the corner, Eldoras notices that the cairn is now disturbed and the four rocks are scattered on the floor.

Farin: Was it that way when we passed last time?

Referee: You don't remember noticing it.

Farin: We'll have to look more carefully next time. Let's go back down to Darzi's body.

Referee: You're there. When you set Darvi down, he finds that he can walk again.

Farin: I think that we should take Darzi's body outside the cave. Narvi will stay here with Darvi and Fredor and work on the lock while the rest of us carry Darzi outside. We should be back shortly.

Referee: You make your way up to the surface without incident and the Door is still open. As you set down Darzi's body, you notice that there is a glint of metal between his teeth which is quite visible in the sunlight.

Goldinor: We look to see what's there.

Referee: Clinched between his teeth, you find a small key, made of mithril, the true silver of the dwarves.

Farin: It appears as if Darzi managed to keep the key away from the orcs after all. We put Darzi's body in the shade of the cave, where someone will bury it, even if we do not find our way back. We then head back down to rejoin the party.

Referee: You make it back to Narvi and the others without encountering anything untoward. Narvi has had no luck with either the lock or the hinges on the door.

Farin: I try the key.

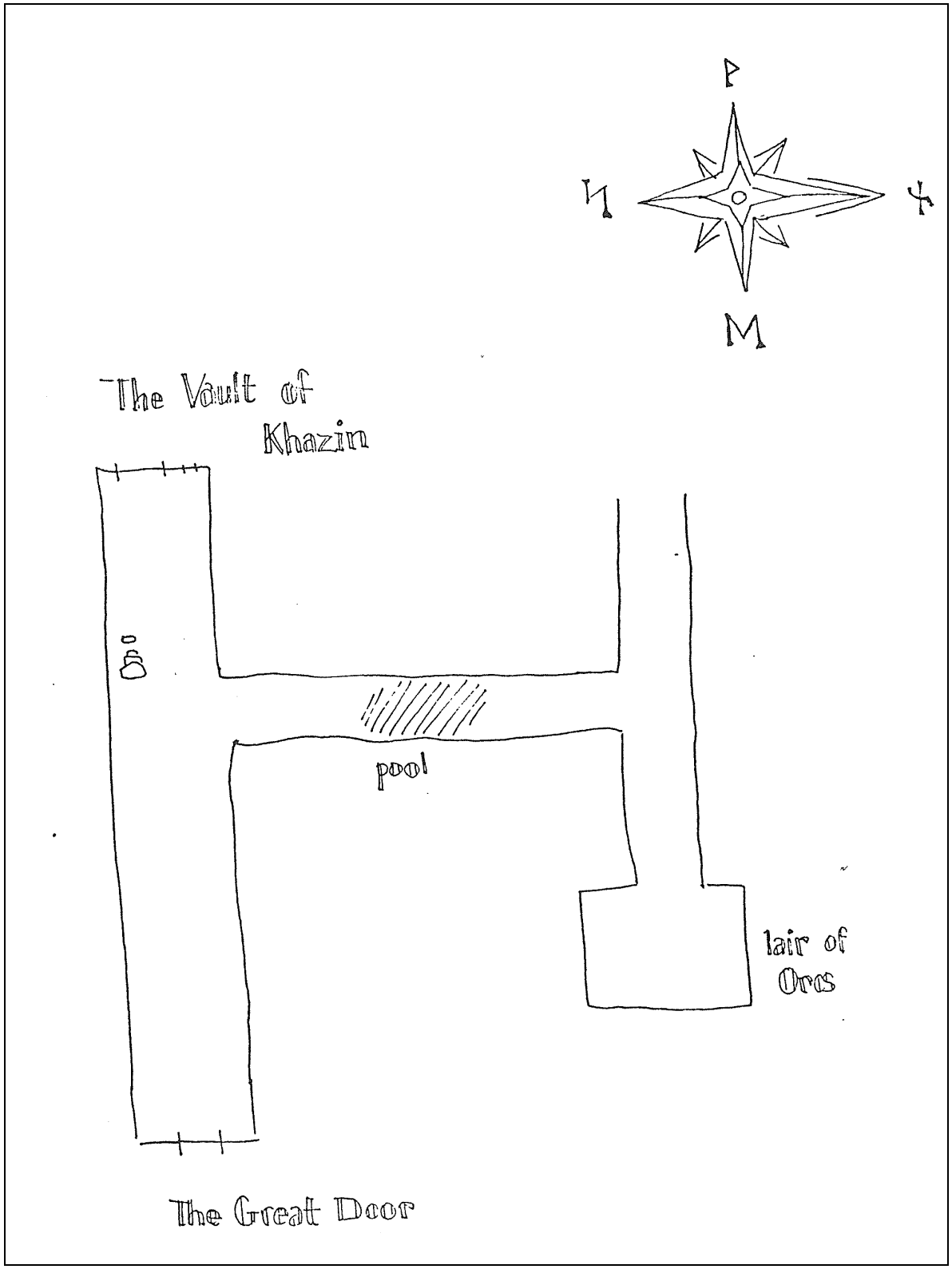
Referee: It fits and turns in the lock.

Farin: I open the door and look beyond.

Referee: The corridor beyond is dark.

Farin: Let's head onward—into the Vault of Khazin!

Farin's map of the Vault of Khazin



Chapter 3
General Notes

3.1 Notes from the Underground

Most of the action of the Mirkwood Tales occurs in underground caverns or inside large buildings rather than in open terrain. There are two principal reasons for restricting the setting in this way. First, the geography of a subterranean fortress or dungeon is much easier to define than that of an open area above ground. Rooms and passages may be described in relatively simple terms, and it is much easier to work with right angles and measurable distances than with general topographic descriptions. Furthermore, by restricting the world to a smaller area, it is possible to make the passage of time more meaningful. When large distances are involved, the time required to move from one region to another must be taken into account. To an extent, this conflicts with the normal flow of time in the Mirkwood Tales. For the most part, an episode in the Mirkwood Tales will represent the passage of several hours, and time in Middle Earth will run at the same rate as time for the players.

For the most part, the passages and rooms in the adventures will be unlit, and the characters must carry their own source of light. It is generally possible to see twenty feet with a torch and forty feet with a lantern, although it is difficult to see much detail at the limits of this range. Light is detectable at a greater range, however, and the use of light will usually alert others to the presence of the approaching party.

There are a number of aspects of underworld adventure that might be considered as part of the game that are ignored in the Mirkwood Tales because the additional complexity required to handle these concerns detracts from the more interesting aspects of the adventure. For example, it is not necessary to stop for meals or to consider the total weight being carried by an individual character except in extreme cases.

Another important example of a concern that is largely disregarded is the question of general supplies of all kinds. Most of the time, the expeditionary party will be based in some town near the site of the adventure, and the townspeople will provide much of the standard equipment such as torches, lanterns, poles, ropes, arrows, knives and so forth. Larger arms and more elaborate equipment must be purchased from general expedition funds. Usually, the individual members of the party will not keep private treasuries but contribute their resources to a common pool.

3.2 The Characters

The players in the Mirkwood Tales take part in the adventure by adopting the roles of the major characters in the epic. Just as the referee has the responsibility to design a world and situations with sufficient detail and interest, the players have the responsibility to add depth to their characters and integrate those characters into the story. For the most part, the players design their own characters by choosing a name; deciding whether to be an elf, dwarf, man, or hobbit; inventing a lineage and personal history; and developing a personality to fit their image of that character.

Although the characters may have widely different backgrounds and personalities, their abilities and powers are limited so that the members of the party will maintain individual talents and no single members will begin to dominate the group. As such, each character must choose one of the following four roles and accept the limitations of that role along with its strengths:

1) Fighter
2) Magic User
3) Loremaster
4) Thief

The Fighter class is characterized by men of strength who tend to excel in combat or in those situations in which brawn is more effective than brain. Although they can use magical weapons and some magical equipment, the science of spells and the use of most magical devices is beyond the scope of their ingenuity. Magic users are those who have spent their youth in the company of elves and wizards and have learned to use spells and magical artifacts. Although their magical abilities often provide an effective substitute, Magic Users have little experience in combat situations and little understanding of the use of normal weapons. Loremasters have grown up in the company of the Wise and draw their strength from their knowledge of history and legend and their mastery of such arts as healing and the detection of evil. Although they use their own form of magic and spells, their magic is generally only of defensive or curative value unlike that of the more powerful Magic Users. Consequently their combat skill is more highly developed than that of the Magic Users, but is in no way comparable to the skill of the Fighter class. The designation of Thief is not particularly accurate to describe the last class and derives from the memory of Bilbo's role as the hobbit burglar. Thieves are not generally able to control magic or cast spells and they are not particularly distinguished in combat; their strength lies in individual talents that make them unique in the party. For example, Thieves are usually more agile and silent and have mastered such talents as picking locks, disarming traps and hiding in shadows.

The characters in the adventure come from one of the races of the Free People in Middle Earth. Men, dwarves, elves, and hobbits each have their own special advantages and limitations, although these limits are not particularly severe. Diversity in the party provides a balance of these individual talents and often adds to the excitement of the story.

Men may assume any of the four character roles and have no special advantages or liabilities. As the largest race among the Free, it is generally assumed that most characters will be men and that more men will be encountered during the expedition than members of the other races. Although men lack some of the special abilities of the other races, their familiarity with the ways of men will often be of value.

Elves may also assume any of the character roles, although they will most often become Magic Users and Loremasters. Elves have more acute perception than the other races and can see an additional ten feet beyond the normal limits of visibility. Furthermore, elves are more likely to hear sounds and to notice secret doors or concealed objects. Most

dwarves and many men, however, hold strong feelings against the elves, which may lead to hostility in some situations.

Dwarves are limited to the Fighter class and, as such, may not make use of most forms of magic. Dwarves are very much at home in the underworld passages and are able to detect sloping passages, new or irregular construction, and many pits and traps. Dwarves are extremely valiant fighters, but at times may be hindered by their size.

Hobbits may be either Fighters or Thieves and are generally unfamiliar with magic. Hobbits have an extremely high resistance to magic, however, and are often unaffected by spells and by magical objects in particular. Hobbits are generally able to move in complete silence. Because of their size and lack of strength, however, hobbits generally are less effective in combat and slightly less likely to inflict serious damage. *

3.3 The Value of Experience

At the beginning of a new adventure in the Mirkwood Tales, each of the characters has very few special abilities, possessions, and strengths. From week to week, as they share in the adventures, those characters acquire new possessions, learn new skills, develop their talents, and grow in power as they gain experience.

The acquisition of experience is represented by awarding "experience points" to the party for successful accomplishments. For example, emerging victorious from some battle or solving a problem will be assigned some value by the referee. At the conclusion of an expedition, the experience points which have been collected are divided equally among the members of the expedition. Each player keeps a record of the total number of experience points received over the course of an adventure, which serves as an index of that player's advancement.

When the total number of experience points held by a character passes certain boundaries, the character is considered to have progressed one additional "level" in experience. For example, each player begins with no experience points as a first level character. When the number of experience points reaches 1000, the character advances to the second level and will continue to advance through additional levels in this way. The number of experience points required to achieve a particular level is given in Table 1.

* The additional resistance to spells and the reduced combat effectiveness are quantitative and are taken into the calculations concerning spell effectiveness and combat resolution. Essentially, hobbits receive a +2 magic bonus and a –1 combat penalty as discussed in later sections.

Table 1. Experience Levels

level	minimum points
1	*none*
2	1000
3	2000
4	4000
5	8000
6	16000
7	32000
8	64000

Different adventures in the Mirkwood Tales are often widely separated in time and space, and the characters in one tale will not generally appear in another. As such, when an adventure reaches its conclusion, the characters in it are "retired" from the game and each player must begin the next adventure with a new inexperienced character.

3.4 Special Abilities

Characters grow in strength in a number of ways besides the accumulation of experience points. Many of the artifacts found during an expedition, particularly those that turn out to have magical properties, will be of great use in future situations. Knowledge gained and clues discovered may be of great value in solving some of the puzzles that arise in the adventure. After thinking about a situation, the characters may invent some new technique or special tools that add to their store of capabilities. In addition, the characters will generally use the time between expeditions to develop new skills and special abilities.

In Chapter 4, special abilities for each of the character roles are described. For example, Fighters may practice their combat techniques to increase their effectiveness or refine their defensive maneuvers. Thieves may learn to hide in shadows or study the art of picking locks and pockets.

Each ability requires some study time (generally measured in weeks which correspond to the time between expeditions) and a minimum level of proficiency before study may begin. As an example, a Thief may learn to pick pockets in two weeks but must be a second-level Thief before beginning the necessary study. With certain abilities, such as picking pockets, there is also a chance of failure, which is included in its general description. The abilities appropriate to each player class are discussed in Chapter 4. The list of abilities is not intended to be complete, and players are encouraged to think of new skills to study for which the referee will determine the appropriate study period, proficiency requirement, and effectiveness.

3.5 Magic and Spells

Magic Users and Loremasters derive much of their strength from the use of magical spells. Spells are handled in much the same manner as other player abilities, but have some additional structure. In addition to study time and proficiency requirements, many spells are grouped together to form a sequence of spells in which the simpler forms of magic serve as prerequisites for more complicated enchantments. The description of a

spell will also generally include a specification of the spell range, its duration, and its frequency. The range of a spell is the distance over which the spell may be cast; if unspecified, the spell is assumed to be limited to the immediate vicinity of the caster. The duration indicates the time period during which the spell will remain in effect if it succeeds. The frequency specification indicates the time period that must elapse (from the time at which the first spell was cast) before the player may again make use of this spell, regardless of whether the current attempt was successful.

3.5.1 Magic Effectiveness

The effectiveness of a spell is determined by the relative magical strength of the caster and the person, monster, or enchantment against which the spell is directed. Every player has a magical strength as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Magical Strength

level	Fighter	Magic User	Loremaster	Thief
1	1	2	2	1
2	1	3	3	2
3	2	4	4	2
4	2	5	5	3
5	3	6	6	4
6	3	7	7	4
7	4	8	8	5
8	4	9	9	6

The table above indicates that a fourth-level Magic User has a magical strength of 5 and that a second-level Fighter has a magical strength of 1. If that Magic User were to direct a spell at the Fighter, the effectiveness of the spell would be determined by their relative magical strength 3 (4 – 1). The table below gives the probability of success for a spell based on relative magic strength:

Table 3. Magic Effectiveness

Relative strength:	–2 or less	–1	0	1	2	3 or more
Chance of success:	10%	20%	40%	60%	80%	90%

In the example above, the relative strength of 3 would give the Magic User a 90% chance of success.

Spells directed against monsters and enchanted objects are handled in much the same way. Monsters and enchantments are assigned magical strengths by the referee even though those strengths may not be known to the players. *

If a spell is directed toward an unenchanted object or someone who is aware of the spell and does not resist it (such as friendly spells directed to other members of the party), the

* If an object is enchanted by a member of the party or someone whose magical strength is known, the magic level of the object is the same as that of its enchanter.

target will be assumed to have a magical strength of 0. The same is true for spells which are not directed at anything in particular (such as spells for creating light and so forth).

3.5.2 Use of Unknown Spells

For the most part, spells are learned by Magic Users and Loremasters in much the same manner as any ability. All users of magic, however, have some knowledge of a wide range of magical arts, and it is possible for Magic User or Loremasters to attempt spells they have not yet studied, although such spells have a low probability of success. Worse still, there is some chance that the spell will backfire with potentially disastrous results.

If one attempts a spell which is technically beyond the level of one's experience (as indicated by the minimum experience requirement of the spell in Chapter 4), there is a 20% chance that the spell will function correctly and a 20% chance of an adverse result of some kind as determined by the referee. If the spell is at or below your experience level, it again has a 20% chance of success but only a 10% chance of an adverse reaction. Even if the spell is technically "successful" by the determination above, it is then treated as a normal spell and may fail on the basis of relative magical strength.

Magic Users may attempt the spells of Loremasters in this way, and vice versa, but the chance of an adverse reaction is doubled.

3.5.3 Magical Artifacts

In addition to spells, magic appears in the Mirkwood Tales in the form of magical artifacts and equipment. More often than not, the magical effect of some object will not be clear from simple examination of the object, and it may require experimentation or searching for further clues to its nature. Magical artifacts are assigned their own magical strength that is used to calculate their effectiveness. Many restrictions on spells may not apply to magical artifacts; in particular, many magical objects may be used repeatedly without a limitation on the frequency of use.

Magic Users, Loremasters, and Thieves may generally make use of any magical artifact or device they find. Fighters, however, may use magical objects only if such use requires no particular ingenuity. For example, Fighters could use magical weapons or a cloak of concealment or something operated by mechanical means. They could not, on the other hand, use a device controlled by mental commands, as is often the case with magical rings and wands.

3.6 The Enemy

Life in the underground realm of the Mirkwood Tales is not always an easy one. The subterranean passages and rooms are often filled with hidden traps that reflect the sinister intent of their design. Dark caverns are likely to conceal orcs and trolls and far more dangerous creatures. But the underground world harbors even greater danger, for it is the home of men with evil minds and unknown powers: dark warriors who kill for pleasure, sorcerers who draw their magic from darkness and shadows, and even enemies who appear as friends.

The enemy in the Mirkwood Tales is completely under the direction of the referee. In the case of mechanical traps and similar hazards as well as most of the less intelligent creatures, the referee need not be particularly subtle. Traps are sprung under certain predefined conditions, monsters attack when the opportunity arises, and so forth. For evil men and other intelligent forces among the enemy, the referee must take on the more difficult challenge of endowing those characters with distinct personalities and special abilities of their own.

Individuals appearing in the legends who are not members of the expedition are referred to as non-player characters. Such characters are often hostile, but may also be sympathetic or indifferent to the party. For the most part, non-player characters are bound by the same physical laws and constraints as the players and will generally fit into one of the standard character roles. Abilities and spells will usually correspond to those available to the members of the party, but the referee is free (as are the players) to use those powers in unexpected and creative ways.

As a general rule, non-player characters encountered close to the surface tend to be considerably weaker than those at greater depths, both in terms of magical ability and physical strength. As such, during the first few weeks of an expedition, the party is likely to encounter characters of their own strength. As the player characters progress and gain additional strength, they also delve deeper into the subterranean world and encounter the stronger characters, allowing the challenges to grow along with the players.

3.7 Combat

Your party is walking slowly down a dark corridor into unexplored and dangerous territory. Suddenly, an arrow passes close to your side and vanishes in the darkness ahead. Turning, you encounter a trio of orcs, each of whom carries a scimitar-like sword and seems eager to charge. You have no thought of running, for the dangers down the passage may be greater still. You decide to stand and fight.

3.7.1 Combat Strength

Each character in the adventure, both player and non-player, is assigned a combat strength which is used, not only as an index of a player's effectiveness in battle, but as a measure of that player's defensive capability. At the beginning of an individual expedition, each of the players is assigned a combat strength as determined by Table 4.

Table 4. Combat Strength

level	Fighter	Magic User	Loremaster	Thief
1	2	1	1	2
2	3	2	2	2
3	4	2	2	3
4	5	2	3	3
5	6	3	3	4
6	7	3	4	5
7	8	3	4	6
8	9	4	5	6

During the course of a battle, players exchange blows and may inflict wounds upon their opponents. The effect of these wounds is represented by reducing the effective combat strength of the target. For example, a third-level Fighter would begin an expedition with a combat strength of 4, but this value would be reduced as wounds were sustained. Damage incurred in battle may be cured through the healing arts of the Loremasters, as described in Chapter 4.

For non-player characters, the referee assigns a combat strength designed to be appropriate to the character role. For example, orcs near the entrance of a cavern correspond roughly to first-level Fighters and would probably have a combat strength of 2.

The referee may also assign a combat strength to an inanimate object, which indicates how difficult such an object is to destroy. The most common instance of this arises in the case of locked doors underground. A wooden door, for example, might be given a combat strength of 3 as an index of the difficulty one would encounter in battering down the door. Attacks against the door would be handled according to the standard rules for combat, until the door was "killed" by the attack. Many doors made of sturdier materials, however, will prove largely impervious to this sort of attack.

3.7.2 Hand-to-Hand Combat

The most common form of combat is the close-quarter individual form of hand-to-hand combat, generally referred to as *melee.* In melee, the opponents take turns so that one party makes an initial attack and the other party has a chance to reply. A single exchange of an attack and counterattack is called a *melee round.* If one side makes an initial attack, the other side is always allowed to complete the melee round by making an attack in reply: "hit-and-run" tactics are not allowed. Once combat begins, melee rounds will generally continue until the battle is ended by death, incapacitation, surrender, retreat, or outside intervention.

The first stage in conducting melee consists of determining which side has the right to make the initial attack. In situations in which both parties are aware of the other and are ready for the battle, each party has an equal chance of winning the advantage of the initial strike. If one party is surprised or ill-prepared, their opponents have an 80% chance of striking the first blow.

The next stage consists of judging the success of an individual attempt and determining the effect of a successful attack. This is determined by the use of combat tables, as given in Table 5 on the next page. For each attack, the referee rolls a ten-sided die and looks up the outcome in the appropriate table. *

To select the correct table entry, the referee first notes the current combat strength of the defender and chooses table a), b), or c) accordingly. The attacker's combat strength (relative to the defender's strength in the third table) then indicates which row of the individual table should be used. The letter in the column indicated by the die roll then

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* In practice, it is easier to select numbers from a table of random digits than it is to roll dice. All random events in the Mirkwood Tales are keyed to percentages or ten-sided dice to facilitate the use of such tables.

Table 5. Combat Results Table

a) Defender's combat level = 1

attacker's level	die roll 0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1	–	–	–	–	*	*	U	U	K	K
2	–	–	–	*	*	U	U	K	K	K
3 or more	–	*	*	U	U	K	K	K	K	K

b) Defender's combat level = 2

attacker's level	die roll 0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1	–	–	–	–	–	*	*	L	L	U
2	–	–	–	*	*	L	L	L	U	K
3	–	–	*	*	L	L	L	U	K	K
4 or more	–	*	*	L	L	L	U	K	K	K

c) Defender's combat level greater than 2

attacker's relative level	die roll 0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
–2 or less	–	–	–	–	–	*	*	L	L	S
–1	–	–	–	–	*	*	L	L	S	S
0	–	–	–	*	*	L	L	L	S	S
+1	–	–	*	*	L	L	L	S	S	S
+2 or more	–	*	*	L	L	L	L	S	S	S

Key to Symbols

– attacker misses
U defender unconscious
K defender killed
L light wound
S serious wound
* special action (see text)

indicates the outcome of the battle. Note that the current combat strength is used in all cases, rather than a player's strength at the beginning of an expedition. As such, a player who sustains wounds becomes a less effective fighter until those wounds are cured.

Six outcomes are indicated in the key to the combat result table. A dash ("–") entry indicates that the attacker failed to hit the target or that the defender was able to parry the blow successfully. The letter "U" indicates that the defender was rendered unconscious by a blow, and will remain out of action for the remainder of the individual melee. Unconscious defenders will generally be killed by a second blow, although the intervention of others may prohibit this. The letter "K" indicates that the defender was killed outright by the assault.

Two types of wounds are indicated in the table. Light wounds (indicated by the letter "L") cause the defender to lose one unit of combat strength. Serious wounds (indicated by the letter "S") cause the loss of two units from the combat strength score. Serious wounds may also be debilitating and are much more difficult to heal. Remember that the combat tables are keyed to an individual's effective combat strength at the moment of

combat. Thus, protracted battles between strong characters usually consist of a series of exchanges using combat table c) until one party is so weakened that the combat strength falls below three, at which point that character may suffer the more serious effects of the first two tables.

A star (*) in the combat tables indicates some special event as determined by the referee. Such events usually fall between a complete miss and a light wound in severity and consist of such happenings as being momentarily staggered, losing a sword, and so forth.

The use of the combat tables is probably best illustrated by example. Suppose that you are a third-level Fighter and that you have just encountered a well-armed orc who appears to be roughly of your own ability and stature. You are not sure of the its exact strength, but you feel that you have no choice but to stand and fight, and you declare your intention to the referee.

The referee then prepares for melee by computing the combat strength of the two adversaries. As a third-level fighter, your combat strength is 4.* The referee has also chosen a combat strength for your opponent, which, in this case, we will assume to be 3. The referee must then determine who will make the first strike by allowing each of you an equal chance. By luck of the toss, you win the right to make the first assault and decide to attack the orc with your sword.

Since the orc's combat strength is greater than 2, table 5c) is used to determine the success of your assault. Your relative strength in combat is 4 – 3 or +1, which indicates the use of the fourth row in the table. The referee then rolls a ten-sided die, and a 6 comes up on its top surface. According to the table, this indicates a light wound. Such a wound causes the orc to lose one unit of its combat strength, which leaves it with an effective strength of 2.

The orc then rushes for its reply and swings its sword aloft. Again, table 5c) is used, although the orc is now battling with a relative strength of 2 – 4 or –2. The die is rolled . . . 7. This indicates another light wound, and your own strength falls to 3.

Once again you attack, this time using table 5b) against the orc who now has a strength of 2. The roll of a 3 indicates some special action. Here the referee decides that the orc has been staggered and that he is unable to reply for the moment. You attack once more, roll a 9, and the orc crumples to the floor.

At the beginning of a melee round, players need not choose to attack their opponents but are free to try to escape or to attempt some other style of combat. For example, Magic Users will generally try to use spells or magical devices rather than take up arms against their enemies. Melee, however, is considered to be fast and furious, and there is little time to make decisions and plot strategy. In order to remain consistent with the structure of time during melee, other actions are somewhat constrained. For Magic Users and Loremasters, casting a spell requires a full melee turn. Thus, a Magic User who employs

* As noted in the following subsection, your combat strength could also be adjusted by bonus scores for special abilities and training. For this example, no combat or weapon bonus is assumed to apply.

a spell against an opponent may not also attempt to attack with a weapon until the opponent has had a chance to respond.

There is one additional restriction during melee that affects all players. During most of the game, members of the party are free to discuss strategy and consider the nature of the problems as a group. In melee, there is no time for this, and each player must act individually. If a player gives advice to another player during melee, that advice is considered to require one melee turn. Thus, a player is allowed to suggest some line of attack to a companions, but in doing so, loses the chance to participate in the current round.

3.7.3 Combat Bonus Scores

Two additional factors affect the operation of hand-to-hand combat, which correspond to the special abilities and strengths of the players and to the particular characteristics of the weapons used. These factors are included as premiums or penalties that must be taken into account when effective fighting strengths are calculated.

Players may bolster their fighting strength through training or from magical spells and devices. This additional strength is represented as a combat bonus, which is taken into account by adding the bonus directly to the effective combat strength score. For example, a Fighter who has practiced swordsmanship (as described under special abilities for Fighters in Chapter 4) would gain one unit of combat strength when attacking with a sword. Note that combat bonus points often apply only to attacking or defending parties, resulting in asymmetric combat strength values for attack and defense.

The difference in the effectiveness of various weapons is included in the form of a weapon bonus score. When the ten-sided die is rolled to determine the outcome of an attack, the weapon bonus is added to the number rolled to yield the number finally used in the tables (if the resulting number is greater than 9 or less than 0, the numbers 9 and 0 are used respectively). For example, if magic sword was endowed with a weapon bonus of +2, a 7 rolled for the determination of combat results would become a 9, which indicates greater damage.

Most weapons used in the adventure carry no special bonus scores. The use of knives, daggers, and similar small arms incurs a weapon penalty of −1. Fighting without weapons at all is calculated using a weapon penalty of −2, although this does not apply to animals or other creatures that do not use weapons. Magical weapons or those specially forged will generally carry bonus scores of +1 or +2.

3.7.4 Multiple Attackers

The discussion above assumes that battles are fought on an individual basis, with one adversary against a private opponent. In the majority of cases, the party of adventures and their adversaries will fight as teams. Allowing multiple attackers or defenders fits in well with the individual combat scheme and does not add much complexity to the combat rules.

In melee situations involving a large number of combatants, each attacker must specify at each turn which individual adversary is being attacked. Each member of the attacking

party then makes an attempt, and, in response, each member of the opposing force is allowed to make a counter. In order to compensate for the advantage of taking the first strike, the referee will often give the first attack to the outnumbered side.

3.7.5 Missile Combat

In addition to the hand-to-hand mode of combat, players may also make use of spears or arrows or similar forms of missiles. Missiles may not be used if the target is within the range of hand-to-hand combat (closer than three feet), and, at greater distances, missile effectiveness is a function of range. If the target is between 3 and 8 feet, it is considered to be at short range, between 8 and 15 feet is considered medium range, and distances between 16 feet and the limits of visibility are considered long range.

The effectiveness of missiles is determined by the following table, which is independent of the combat strength for both the attacker and the defender:

Table 6. Missile Effectiveness

	die roll									
	0	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**
short range	–	–	–	–	L	L	L	L	S	S
medium range	W	–	–	–	–	L	L	L	L	S
long range	W	W	–	–	–	–	L	L	L	S

– miss
L light wound
S serious wound
W wild shot

The effects of light and serious wounds as indicated in the table above are the same as those in the main combat result table. If any wound is sustained by a character whose effective combat strength is 1, or if a serious wound is sustained by a character with a combat strength of 2, the character is killed by the wound. The letter "W" in the table above indicates a wild shot, which may hit anything in the area at the discretion of the referee.

3.7.6 On Death and Dying

Death in the Mirkwood Tales is not limited to the enemy, and in the course of an expedition, members of the party are likely to be killed in combat or by the other dangers of the subterranean world. In all games designed along the lines of Dungeons and Dragons, there is a strong temptation to make death somewhat less fatal by allowing resurrection or reincarnation. In Tolkien's world, the ordinary character has no power over death, and only Gandalf is able to return to the world of the living. As such, resurrection does not play a part in the Mirkwood Tales, and death truly represents the final moment of a character's existence.

If the character belonging to some player dies, the player will usually create a new character to join the party. New characters always begin as first-level characters and will

generally be much weaker than the surviving party members, although the number of experience points required to rise to a new level is graduated in such a way that new characters are able to catch up to the other members of the party in a few expeditions.

3.8 The Monsters of Middle Earth

The evil creatures that inhabit the underworld in the Mirkwood Tales are generally drawn directly from the Lord of the Rings, and the Tolkien enthusiast is likely to be familiar with the habits and powers of most such monsters. This section describes some of the particular features of the more common hostile creatures.

Orcs are by far the most common of the enemy creatures likely to be encountered by the party. The orcs were created by Morgoth in the First Age in the imitation of elves and formed the backbone of his army as well as Sauron's. Orcs generally dislike sunlight but, unlike trolls, are able to travel by day. They tend to be short, squat, and vulgar, have long arms and fang-like teeth, and enjoy destruction and killing. As warriors, most orcs will correspond in strength to Fighters of the first, second, or third level. Orcs can be particularly dangerous, however, since they often attack in large parties.

The trolls were also the creation of Morgoth and were made in the imitation of the Ents. Trolls are extremely tall and strong, although they also tend to be relatively unintelligent. Trolls turn to stone in sunlight, but can be dangerous enemies underground. Their combat strength is roughly equivalent to that of Fighters between third and fifth level.

While there are many animals that may be both dangerous and hostile, the most deadly are probably the wargs who resemble wolves in their general appearance. Unlike true wolves, the wargs are intelligent and acted as the allies of the orcs in the service of Sauron. Wargs have an average effective combat strength of four, which makes them particularly potent enemies.

Most of the more potent creatures of evil seem to be restricted to small regions of Middle Earth, such as the dragons of the Ered Mithrin, the barrow-wights on the Downs, Shelob in Cirith Ungol, or the balrog in Moria. It is always possible to find similar creatures lurking deep within the passages of a forgotten underground land, but such creatures are known only through legend and are far less familiar than the orcs and trolls.

Chapter 4
Notes on the Character Types

This chapter consists of additional information that pertains to one of the four character roles. For the most part, each of the individual sections is devoted to a description of the special abilities and spells that are available to that character class. The list of special abilities is not intended to be complete, and characters are encouraged to devise other special abilities for study subject to the approval of the referee.

As noted in Chapter 2, each of the abilities requires some study time and a minimum level of proficiency before it may be learned. Occasionally, one spell or ability will also require previous knowledge of related skills. Each of the requirements for the abilities are listed in a header that accompanies the description of the skill.

At the end of each week's expedition, the players must declare what special work, practice, or study they will engage in during the coming week. For example, at the end of the first expedition, a Fighter might declare an intention to study the art of Marksmanship. This ability requires two weeks of study, during which the Fighter will be assumed to devote full time to this pursuit. At the end of that period (in time for the third expedition), the Fighter will be able to make use of the resulting improvement in accuracy.

4.1 Fighters

The Fighters in an expedition have the general responsibility for bearing the burden of combat situations and other activities that require physical strength or endurance. The principal advantage of Fighters over the other character is a much stronger effective combat strength than other character types at the same level of experience. Their disadvantage lies in their inability to use spells and magical artifacts that require ingenuity or mental control.

The principal tools of the Fighter's trade are the weapons carries into battle. A Fighter (or any other character who participates in combat) is assumed to have a principal weapon that is always at hand. Unless the weapon is of some special origin or magically endowed, there is no particular advantage of one weapon type over another in terms of combat resolution, although a player may choose a particular type either to fit the character or because it serves some additional purpose.

At the beginning of an expedition, Fighters may choose a principal weapon along with simple defensive armor and shield. Each Fighter may also choose to carry additional weapons (particularly a short bow) so long as the weapons would ordinarily not impede movement. Later in the expedition, Fighters may try to obtain special equipment, such as magical weaponry or dwarf mail. The cost (and availability) of such items is determined by the referee and is likely to be high.

Several special abilities open to Fighters are outlined below:

Weapon mastery

Study time: 2 weeks
Minimum experience level: 1

This ability represents increased skill with some particular weapon and is applicable only with that particular weapon. When using the weapon studied, the Fighter attacks with an effective fighting strength one greater than that given by the combat table. Several weapons may be studied, but a Fighter may not add additional bonus points for further studies of the same weapon.

Marksmanship

Study time: 2 weeks
Minimum experience level: 1

Increases the Fighter's accuracy with the short bow. This increased accuracy is taken into account by adding one to the die roll used to determine the missile effect. Thus, a die roll of 6 at long range would be counted as a 7, resulting in a hit instead of a miss.

Running

Study time: 2 weeks
Minimum experience level: 1

Through practice, Fighters may increase their running speed, which may prove useful both to close on opponents or to escape from them. Its application is relatively subjective and is at the discretion of the referee.

Shield skill

Study time: 2 weeks
Minimum experience level: 2

Fighters may study their shield technique to improve their defensive capability. The effect of this ability is to raise the effective level of the fighter by one in defensive calculations only.

Leadership

Study time: 3 weeks
Minimum experience level: 2

This ability indicates that the Fighter has learned to rally other members of the party in battle. Whenever a Fighter with this skill leads a charge (strikes the first blow), any other Fighters or Thieves participating in the battle will gain two units of combat strength for the first attack attempted in the current battle. For example, if a first-level Thief were to follow such a Fighter into a battle, the Thief's first strike would be made with a combat strength of 4 rather than 2. Any subsequent melee turns would be conducted at the current level of each player's strength.

Command fear

Study time: 3 weeks
Minimum experience level: 2

Fighters may learn to instill fear in the hearts of their enemies in battle. The effect of this ability is to encourage members of the enemy party to flee before a battle begins. Any member of the opposing force who is weaker (in terms of combat strength) has a 50% chance of running away at the Fighter's approach; an enemy of comparable strength has a 20% chance of being affected in this way.

Resistance to pain

Study time: 2 weeks
Minimum experience level: 3

Indicates that the Fighter now has increased tolerance for pain and is unlikely to be debilitated by simple wounds. The effect of this ability is to prevent the Fighter from being staggered in battle ("*" entries in the combat table are treated as "–" entries) and will usually keep the Fighter from being disabled by a serious wound.

4.2 Magic Users

In many ways, the Magic Users are the most powerful of the Mirkwood characters. Their strength depends on the power of spells and magical devices. Armed with those spells, the Magic Users are able to draw the forces of nature into their arsenal; without them, however, the Magic Users become virtually helpless and must rely on the protection of the party to compensate for their lack of physical strength.

There are a wide variety of spells and abilities open to the Magic Users, although it is difficult to master more than a tiny fraction of the vast power of the magical world. Furthermore, many of the more powerful spells depend upon long practice with simpler spells of a related nature. In order to gain command of such powerful spells, the Magic User is generally forced to specialize in particular areas of magical study.

Magic Users may also define their own areas of study and invent new spells and abilities subject to the approval of the referee. One possibility that may prove attractive for some Magic Users would be a highly potent spell with a low probability of success (such as a spell that kills an adversary outright 10% of the time).

A number of the spells below are listed as separate entries but in fact represent single spells at varying levels of proficiency. These are indicated by adding Roman numerals to the basic spell name (as in Sleep I through Sleep IV). Even if a Magic User has studied each level of this spell, that player may only apply one form of the spell at a time and must wait for the appropriate period before making a second attempt.

In addition to the limitation of their combat strength, Magic Users may arm themselves only with daggers, knives and other small arms. As such, Magic Users must depend entirely on their mastery of magic. At the beginning of an expedition, a Magic User is allowed to select any ability or spell from the list below which may be used by first-level characters and has no prerequisite. The spells and abilities available to Magic Users are listed below, organized according to the nature of the spell:

4.2.1 Magical Abilities

Read Magic

Study time: ----
Minimum experience level: 1 Prerequisite: none
Duration: permanent Frequency: ----

This ability allows the Magic User to decipher most forms of magical writing, such as that used on magical artifacts and scrolls. Although this study covers many of the more common forms of rune letters and the language of magic, there are a number of forms, particularly ancient ones, which may not be covered by this skill. It is often possible, however, to decipher even the most unfamiliar forms of magical symbols by devoting additional time to the interpretation. For example, if a Magic User were to encounter a scroll whose meaning was initially unclear, it might be possible to complete a translation by investing a week of dedicated study. Unfortunately, such success is not at all certain, and misinterpretations occasionally occur.

4.2.2 Spells of Fire Control

Fire Control

Study time: 1 week Range: 15 feet
Minimum experience level: 1 Duration: ----
Prerequisite: none Frequency: 15 minutes

This spell represents the most basic form of fire control. This spell allows the Magic User to ignite any inanimate object within range that would ordinarily burn. For example, this spell would allow the Magic User to light torches at a distance, set fire to a wooden bridge, and so forth. Once lit, the Magic User has no control over the flame, which just burns normally until it is extinguished or burns itself out.

Pyrotechnics

Study time: 2 weeks Range: 15 feet
Minimum experience level: 2 Duration: momentary
Prerequisite: Fire control Frequency: 15 minutes

This spell allows the Magic User to create virtual displays of dazzling flame and explosions in mid-air. The flame is not hot enough to ignite any object but causes brilliant flashes that will temporarily stagger most opponents who watch the display. Against weak, unintelligent opponents, the pyrotechnic display will often instill fear and cause the opponents to flee. This is computed in the same manner as for the "Command fear" ability for Fighters.

Smoke

Study time: 2 weeks Range: 20 feet
Minimum experience level: 2 Duration: 5 minutes
Prerequisite: Fire control Frequency: 15 minutes

This spell allows the Magic User to create a smoke screen that blankets a circular area with a ten-foot radius surrounding the point at which the spell was aimed. Visibility

through the smoke screen is zero, although it does not impede progress and is not generally irritating to the eyes.

Fire protection

Study time: 2 weeks
Minimum experience level: 3
Prerequisite: Fire control
Range: ----
Duration: 5 minutes
Frequency: 15 minutes

Allows the Magic User to endure flame of any temperature for a period of five minutes. Even if the fire is created by a hostile Magic User, this immunity is independent of relative magic level.

Dispel fire

Study time 2 weeks
Minimum experience level: 3
Prerequisite: Fire control
Range: 25 feet
Duration: ----
Frequency: 15 minutes

Using this spell, the Magic User may attempt to extinguish any flame or fire within the spell range. If the flame is of magical origin, it will have a magical strength equal to that of its creator. Natural flames have an effective magical strength of zero.

Wall of fire

Study time: 2 weeks
Minimum experience level: 3
Prerequisite: Fire control
Range: 10 feet
Duration: 1 hour
Frequency: 3 hours

This spell establishes a three-foot wall of flame that will stretch across a corridor up to ten feet in width. Unless protected against fire, anyone attempting to pass through the wall will suffer at least a serious wound. Most creatures, however, will not even attempt to pass. The wall of flame takes a few moments to reach its full intensity and any creature that is actually standing where the wall is cast has enough time to jump to either side of the wall without harm.

Fireball

Study time: 3 weeks
Minimum experience level: 4
Prerequisite: Wall of fire
Range: 50 feet
Duration: momentary
Frequency: 15 minutes

This spell allows the Magic User to create a ball of flame three feet in diameter and hurl it magically along a straight path up to fifty feet in length. The fireball moves so quickly that it cannot be avoided by any creature in its path, although it may be dispelled by a strong Magic User. Any creatures it encounters will sustain the equivalent of a serious wound. If used against an advancing enemy group, the fireball will generally affect only the first three individuals, who effectively shield those further behind from any significant damage.

4.2.3 Spells of Sleep

Sleep I

Study time: 1 week
Minimum experience level: 1
Prerequisite: none
Range: 25 feet
Duration: 5 minutes
Frequency: 15 minutes

This spell may be directed at a group of up to five individuals and, if successful, will cause them to sleep for a period of five minutes. This spell may only be used if the targets are not aware of the presence of the Magic User's party and, in particular, may not be used during melee. This spell is particular valuable when one encounters sentries without alerting them to your presence.

Sleep II

Study time: 1 week
Minimum experience level: 1
Prerequisite: Sleep I
Range: 25 feet
Duration: 5 minutes
Frequency: 15 minutes

This spell is directed at a single opponent and, if successful, causes the opponent to sleep for a period of five minutes, even if the target is actively participating in a melee situation. The victim will wake if shaken.

Sleep III

Study time: 2 weeks
Minimum experience level: 2
Prerequisite: Sleep II
Range: 25 feet
Duration: 10 hours
Frequency: 15 minutes

This spell functions in much the same manner as Sleep II but is of much longer duration. Individuals who have been made to sleep through this spell will sleep for ten hours, and may not be awakened unless the enchantment is dispelled.

Sleep IV

Study time: 2 weeks
Minimum experience level: 3
Prerequisite: Sleep III
Range: 25 feet
Duration: 10 hours
Frequency: 15 minutes

This spell functions in much the same manner as Sleep III, but may be directed against as many as ten opponents.

4.2.4 Detection of Magic

Detect Magic I

Study time: 1 week
Minimum experience level: 1
Prerequisite: none
Range: 15 feet
Duration: momentary
Frequency: 15 minutes

When using this spell, the Magic User is allowed to define any region (up to the spell range) and determine whether any enchantment has been placed on objects within that region. For example, this spell allows the Magic User to determine whether any single object is magical in nature. Alternatively, the Magic User may specify an

entire room and determine whether the room has any magical contents, although the spell gives no idea where the magical object might be located. In either case, the spell gives no clue as to the nature of the enchantment.

Detect Magic II

Study time: 1 week	Range: 15 feet
Minimum experience level: 2	Duration: momentary
Prerequisite: Detect Magic I	Frequency: 15 minutes

This spell functions in the same manner as Detect Magic I, but indicates the exact direction of the magical artifact relative to the Magic User.

Detect Magic III

Study time: 2 weeks	Range: 15 feet
Minimum experience level: 3	Duration: 5 minutes
Prerequisite: Detect Magic II	Frequency: 15 minutes

This spell is similar to Detect Magic II except that it remains in effect for five minutes, allowing the Magic User to notice when magical objects are encountered during exploration of large areas.

Detect Magic IV

Study time: 3 weeks	Range: 15 feet
Minimum experience level: 4	Duration: permanent
Prerequisite: Detect Magic III	Frequency: ----

This spell gives the Magic User the ability to detect any magical enchantment within a 15 foot radius.

4.2.5 Spells against Magic

Counteract Enchantment

Study time: 1 week	Range: 25 feet
Minimum experience level: 1	Duration: momentary
Prerequisite: none	Frequency: 15 minutes

This spell must be directed at a Magic User in the process of casting a spell or employing a magical device. The intent of this spell is to cause a hostile spell to fail. For example, this spell might be directed against a hostile magician attempting to cast a Sleep spell. If the Counteract Enchantment spell succeeds, then the Sleep spell fails. Even if the Counteract Enchantment spell fails, the Sleep spell has its normal chance of failure.

Dispel Magic I

Study time: 2 weeks	Range: 25 feet
Minimum experience level: 2	Duration: 5 minutes
Prerequisite: Counteract Enchantment	Frequency: 15 minutes

This spell is used to counteract the effects of a specific enchantment or to disable a magical device for a short period of time. The success of the spell is determined by

the relative magic level of the caster and the Magic User who originally set the enchantment. During the five minute period, the effects of a spell will be nullified and any magical artifact will have no power. After that time, the spell will again take effect and magical artifacts will recover their power.

Dispel Magic II

Study time: 2 weeks	Range: 25 feet
Minimum experience level: 3	Duration: permanent
Prerequisite: Dispel Magic I	Frequency: 15 minutes

This spell functions in the same manner as Dispel Magic I, except that the magic of the spell or artifact is permanently neutralized.

Anti-magic Shell

Study time: 2 weeks	Range: ----
Minimum experience level: 3	Duration: permanent
Prerequisite: Dispel Magic I	Frequency: ----

This spell causes the Magic User to be permanently surrounded by a magical aura, which is resistant to hostile magic. The effect of this enchantment is to double the effective magical strength of the Magic User when computing defensive spell resistance.

4.2.6 Spells of Command

Charm

Study time: 1 week	Range: 25 feet
Minimum experience level: 2	Duration: 1 minute
Prerequisite: none	Frequency: 15 minutes

This spell causes one hostile creature to come under the command of the Magic User for one minute. During this time, the charmed creature will answer questions, attack its own party, or run away, but will not willingly jeopardize its own life. If the charmed creature is attacked, it will defend itself in a normal fashion. After the one-minute period, the creature will be free of control. Any individual creature may be charmed only once by a particular Magic User.

Suggestion

Study time: 2 weeks	Range: 25 feet
Minimum experience level: 3	Duration: 1 hour
Prerequisite: Charm	Frequency: 15 minutes

This spell allows the Magic User to specify a single command, which the target will attempt to perform as long as the completion of the assigned task does not go against its basic principles. For most chaotic creatures, very few principles are in force, so that suggestions against such creatures may often involve attacking other members of the hostile party. The suggestion remains in effect until the command is carried out, the charm is dispelled, the target dies, or one hour elapses.

4.2.7 Spells of Protection

Shield I

Study time: 1 week
Minimum experience level: 1
Prerequisite: none
Range: within reach
Duration: 1 melee turn
Frequency: 15 minutes

This spell erects a magical shield against weapons which protects the Magic User from attack by normal weapons. The spell effectively counters any blow or set of blows (from multiple attackers) for one melee turn, independent of the strength of the attackers. In the next round, blows will have their normal chance of success. After their first blow fails, however, many opponents may turn their attention to other targets. This spell is not effective against missiles.

Protection

Study time: 2 weeks
Minimum experience level: 2
Prerequisite: none
Range: ----
Duration: 5 minutes
Frequency: 15 minutes

This spell raises the effective fighting level of the Magic User by one for defensive calculations only.

Shield II

Study time: 2 weeks
Minimum experience level: 3
Prerequisite: Shield I
Range: within reach
Duration: 5 minutes
Frequency: 15 minutes

This spell functions in the same manner as Shield I, except that the shield remains in place for five minutes (approximately ten melee turns). The Magic User may not engage in physical combat while the shield is in force, but may cast additional spells.

Protection from missiles

Study time: 2 weeks
Minimum experience level: 3
Prerequisite: Protection
Range: ----
Duration: 5 minutes
Frequency: 15 minutes

When this spell is in effect, the Magic User is impervious to all normal missiles. If magical arrows are used, their success will depend on the relative magic strength.

4.2.8 Lock Spells

Hold Portal I

Study time: 1 week
Minimum experience level: 1
Prerequisite: none
Range: 15 feet
Duration: 5 minutes
Frequency: 15 minutes

This spell will hold any door fixed in its present position and prevent it from being opened or closed by normal means. The door may still be destroyed, although this will certainly slow opponents down.

Hold Portal II

Study time: 2 weeks
Minimum experience level: 2
Prerequisite: Hold Portal I
Range: 15 feet
Duration: 1 day
Frequency: 1 hour

This spell is similar to Hold Portal I except for the extended duration.

Command Portal

Study time: 2 weeks
Minimum experience level: 2
Prerequisite: Hold Portal I
Range: 15 feet
Duration: 5 minutes
Frequency: 15 minutes

When this spell is applied against a door, the door comes under the Magic User's command and will open and shut by mental suggestion. For the duration of the spell, the door may not be moved by normal force. This spell will not lock or unlock a door, however.

Knock

Study time: 3 weeks
Minimum experience level: 3
Prerequisite: Hold Portal I
Range: within reach
Duration: ----
Frequency: 15 minutes

This spell attempts to unlock a door locked by magical or mechanical means and is dependent on the relative magical strength of the Magic User and the lock. Even mechanical locks will have non-zero magical strengths that indicate their complexity and resistance to magic.

4.2.9 Invisibility

Invisibility I

Study time: 2 weeks
Minimum experience level: 2
Prerequisite: none
Range: ----
Duration: 5 minutes
Frequency: 15 minutes

This spell renders the Magic User invisible for a period of five minutes. The Magic User will continue to cast a shadow, however, which can makes the Magic User visible to careful searchers. The Magic User may not attack while invisible.

Invisibility II

Study time: 2 weeks
Minimum experience level: 3
Prerequisite: Invisibility I
Range: ----
Duration: 5 minutes
Frequency: 15 minutes

This spell is similar to Invisibility I except that this spell also conceals the Magic User's shadow making detection impossible by normal sight.

Detect Invisible I

Study time: 2 weeks
Minimum experience level: 2
Prerequisite: none
Range: 15 feet
Duration: momentary
Frequency: 15 minutes

This spell allows the Magic User to detect any invisible objects within range at the time the spell is cast.

Detect Invisible II

Study time: 2 weeks
Minimum experience level: 3
Prerequisite: Detect Invisible I
Range: 15 feet
Duration: permanent
Frequency: ----

This spell gives the Magic User the ability to detect invisible objects without having to specifically cast a spell.

Conceal Object I

Study time: 2 weeks
Minimum experience level: 2
Prerequisite: none
Range: within reach
Duration: 5 minutes
Frequency: 15 minutes

Through the use of this spell, any object small enough to fit inside a one-foot sphere will be rendered invisible.

Conceal Object II

Study time: 3 weeks
Minimum experience level: 4
Prerequisite: Conceal Object I
Range: 5 feet
Duration: 5 minutes
Frequency: 15 minutes

This spell conceals all objects and individuals within a five-foot circle.

4.2.10 Spells of Enchantment

Enchant Object

Study time: 3 weeks
Minimum experience level: 3
Prerequisite: none
Range: within reach
Duration: permanent
Frequency: (see description)

Using this spell, the Magic User may endow any small metallic object with the power of any spell previously mastered. All limitations on spell frequency and duration apply to the enchanted object in the same fashion as the original spell. For example, a Magic User who had previously learned invisibility could use this spell to create an invisibility ring that would extend this power to another member of the party. The number of weeks required to enchant an object is equal to the time required to learn the spell whose power is being duplicated. The Magic User is assumed to be working full-time on the enchantment and may not study other spells during that time.

Enchant Weapon I

Study time: 3 weeks
Minimum experience level: 3
Prerequisite: none
Range: within reach
Duration: permanent
Frequency: 2 weeks

This spell will turn any normal weapon into a magical weapon with a +1 weapon bonus. The Magic User may not study additional spells during the time required for the enchantment.

Enchant Weapon II

Study time: 2 weeks
Minimum experience level: 4
Prerequisite: Enchant Weapon I
Range: within reach
Duration: permanent
Frequency: 3 weeks

This spell is similar to Enchant Weapon I, but creates a weapon with a +2 weapon bonus.

4.2.11 Miscellaneous Spells

ESP

Study time: 2 weeks
Minimum experience level: 2
Prerequisite: none
Range: 20 feet
Duration: momentary
Frequency: 15 minutes

This spell allows the Magic User to sense the presence of any conscious being and gain a rough idea of its intelligence. The spell detects such intelligence within a sphere with a radius of 20 feet independent of walls, floors, and other obstructions.

Infravision

Study time: 3 weeks
Minimum experience level: 3
Prerequisite: none
Range: 50 feet
Duration: 5 minutes
Frequency: 15 minutes

When cast, this spell allows the Magic User to see in total darkness for a distance of fifty feet.

Telekenesis

Study time: 3 weeks
Minimum experience level: 3
Prerequisite: none
Range: 20 feet
Duration: 1 minute
Frequency: 15 minutes

Using this spell, the Magic User may cause any small object weighing less than 100 grams to move through the air for up to a minute. The object must stay within range at all times.

4.3 Loremasters

The Loremasters of the Mirkwood Tales lie somewhere in the middle of the spectrum formed by the Fighters and the Magic Users. The Loremasters are not powerful warriors by any means and are not as strong as Fighters or even Thieves, but they are not nearly as helpless as Magic Users. At the same time, the Loremasters have a command of magical spells and special abilities that provide them with additional strength. For the most part, the spells used by Loremasters are defensive in nature and are not as powerful or as varied as those available to more dedicated students of the magical arts.

Although Loremasters do not excel either in terms of physical or magical prowess, a Loremaster is of great value to the party for a number of reasons. In particular, the most important spells of the Loremasters are those of healing, without which the party would be forced to retreat to allow any accumulated wounds to heal.

In addition, all Loremasters are students of history, which is often useful in deciphering clues and gaining an understanding of the background of the legend. During each expedition, a Loremaster is able to ask the referee one question of legend for each level of experience. For example, if the party discovered a stone tablet bearing a signature, a Loremaster could ask if whether there were any legends concerning that particular individual. The referee will not always answer such inquiries but will attempt to reward questions that indicate clever insights by making additional knowledge available.

A number of the spells below are listed as separate entries but in fact represent single spells at varying levels of proficiency (such as Hold I and Hold II). Even if a Loremaster has studied each level of this spell, that player may only apply one form of the spell at a time and must wait for the appropriate period before making a second attempt.

At the beginning of an expedition, a Loremaster may select any ability or spell from the list below that may be used by first-level characters and has no prerequisite. The spells and abilities open to Loremasters are listed below:

Cure Light Wounds

Study time: 1 week	Range: within reach
Minimum experience level: 1	Duration: ----
Prerequisite: none	Frequency: 15 minutes

This spell restores the effective combat strength lost through light wounds. For each level the Loremaster has attained, one light wound may be countered by each invocation of the spell, although the spell may be directed only toward a single member of the party. This spell may not be used to counter the effects of serious wounds or disabilities. The actual curative effect of this spell may be delayed for a period of time determined by the referee, although it will often be immediate.

Cure Serious Wounds

Study time: 2 weeks	Range: within reach
Minimum experience level: 2	Duration: ----
Prerequisite: Cure Light Wounds	Frequency: 15 minutes

This spell restores the effective combat strength lost through a single serious wound and counteracts any disability sustained through it. The effect of this spell is usually delayed.

Detect Evil I

Study time: 1 week
Minimum experience level: 1
Prerequisite: none
Range: 15 feet
Duration: momentary
Frequency: 15 minutes

Detects the presence of evil thought or evil enchantment within a circle with a radius of 15 feet. Note that such dangers as poison, mechanical traps, and unintelligent creatures will not be considered as evil. This spell gives no clue as to the source of the evil enchantment but simply announces its presence.

Detect Evil II

Study time: 1 week
Minimum experience level: 2
Prerequisite: Detect Evil I
Range: 15 feet
Duration: momentary
Frequency: 15 minutes

This spell allows the Loremaster to pinpoint the source of the evil enchantment within the spell radius.

Detect Evil III

Study time: 2 weeks
Minimum experience level: 3
Prerequisite: Detect Evil II
Range: 15 feet
Duration: 5 minutes
Frequency: 15 minutes

This spell is similar to Detect Evil II, except for an extended duration.

Detect Evil IV

Study time: 3 weeks
Minimum experience level: 4
Prerequisite: Detect Evil III
Range: 15 feet
Duration: permanent
Frequency: ----

This spell gives the Loremaster the ability to detect any evil thought or enchantment at any time.

Protection from Evil

Study time: 2 weeks
Minimum experience level: 1
Prerequisite: none
Range: ----
Duration: 5 minutes
Frequency: 15 minutes

This spell functions exactly like the Protection spell for Magic Users.

Bless

Study time: 2 weeks
Minimum experience level: 2
Prerequisite: Protection from Evil
Range: 15 feet
Duration: 5 minutes
Frequency: 15 minutes

This spell may be used to raise the combat level of any individual by one unit for both attack and defense calculations.

Circle of Protection

Study time: 3 weeks
Minimum experience level: 4
Prerequisite: Protection from Evil
Range: 10 feet
Duration: 5 minutes
Frequency: 15 minutes

This spell is the equivalent of a Protection from Evil spell except that its effects extend to all members of the party within a radius of ten feet.

Dispel Evil

Study time: 3 weeks
Minimum experience level: 3
Prerequisite: none
Range: 15 feet
Duration: permanent
Frequency: 15 minutes

This spell neutralizes any evil enchantment and functions in the same manner as Dispel Magic II.

Illusion I

Study time: 2 weeks
Minimum experience level: 2
Prerequisite: none
Range: 100 feet
Duration: up to 1 hour
Frequency: (see description)

This spell allows the Loremaster to create a static illusion that will affect any creature within the 100-foot range who has no reason to disbelieve the illusion. The illusion itself may appear at any distance (only its viewers must be in range) and it must be unchanging. The illusion itself is harmless although it may frighten those who believe in it and make them take dangerous actions to escape. The illusion ceases to appear to any individual who has cause to doubt its reality. While the illusion is active, the Loremaster must continue to concentrate on the illusion and may not cast any additional spells or engage in combat without disrupting the illusion. The illusion may be maintained for up to an hour, but once broken, the Loremaster must wait until at least twice the time spent managing the last illusion has passed before attempting another. In any case, the Loremaster must wait at least fifteen minutes between casting spells of illusion.

Illusion II

Study time: 2 weeks
Minimum experience level: 3
Prerequisite: Illusion I
Range: 100 feet
Duration: up to 1 hour
Frequency: as for Illusion I

This spell is the same as Illusion I except that it allows the Loremaster to change the illusion dynamically. The frequency and duration are the same as for Illusion I.

Hold I

Study time: 2 weeks
Minimum experience level: 2
Prerequisite: none
Range: 15 feet
Duration: up to 1 hour
Frequency: (see description)

Through this spell, the Loremaster attempts to hold another individual transfixed and totally unable to move. If the Hold is successful, it requires the complete energy of the Loremaster to sustain it. The Loremaster is therefore also held but nonetheless remains aware of other events and may break the Hold if need be. Once used, this spell may not be attempted until at least twice the amount of time spent in the last Hold spell. For example, if a Loremaster held some individual for the full hour, the Hold spell could not be repeated until two additional hours had elapsed. In any case, Hold spells must be separated by at least fifteen minutes.

Hold II

Study time: 2 weeks
Minimum experience level: 3
Prerequisite: Hold I
Range: 15 feet
Duration: up to 1 hour
Frequency: as for Hold I

This spell functions in the same manner as Hold I, but the Loremaster may attempt to use the spell simultaneously on as many as four targets.

Light

Study time: 1 week
Minimum experience level: 1
Prerequisite: none
Range: 10 feet
Duration: 5 minutes
Frequency: 15 minutes

This spell creates a magical light that is as powerful as a lantern but is less easily extinguished.

Continual Light

Study time: 3 weeks
Minimum experience level: 3
Prerequisite: Light
Range: 20 feet
Duration: permanent
Frequency: 1 week

Through this spell, the Loremaster may create a small sphere of light, which illuminates an area up to fifty feet with a brilliance equal to that of daylight. Once set, such lights are stationary and will continue to shine until dispelled.

Neutralize Poison

Study time: 3 weeks
Minimum experience level: 3
Prerequisite: none
Range: within reach
Duration: -----
Frequency: 15 minutes

Through this spell, the Loremaster is able to neutralize poison or cure its effects.

Detect Traps

Study time: 2 weeks
Minimum experience level: 2
Prerequisite: none
Range: 20 feet
Duration: 5 minutes
Frequency: 15 minutes

This spell allows the Loremaster to locate any mechanical trap within a radius of 20 feet.

Locate Object

Study time: 2 weeks
Minimum experience level: 3
Prerequisite: none
Range: 20 feet
Duration: momentary
Frequency: 15 minutes

When cast, this spell allows the Loremaster to find any object within range as long as the Loremaster could provide a reasonable description of the object.

Speak with Animals

Study time: 2 weeks
Minimum experience level: 2
Prerequisite: none
Range: ----
Duration: permanent
Frequency: ----

This spell provides the Loremaster with the ability to understand the language of animals.

4.4 Thieves

Ever since the time of Bilbo's adventures, the title of Thief has carried a certain amount of respect and admiration in Middle Earth. The Thieves of the Mirkwood Tales are specialists in the honest arts of "burglaring" and have many special abilities that set them apart from the rest of the party. In combat, Thieves are less effective than Fighters, but are somewhat stronger than Loremasters, particularly at higher levels. In addition, Thieves are particularly dexterous and quick and will generally be able to strike the first blow in single combat situations. Thieves may not learn spells in the manner of the Magic Users or the Loremasters, but are clever enough to employ most magical artifacts.

At the beginning of the first expedition, Thieves may select one of the special abilities below which may be used by first-level characters. More than for any other character role, the special abilities for Thieves are open to extension and the Thief should always be prepared to invent new abilities not shown on the list below:

Move Silently

Study time: 2 weeks
Minimum experience level: 1
Prerequisite: none
Probability of success: 90%

This endows the Thief with the ability to move silently and escape detection, particularly if coupled with the ability to hide in shadows.

Hide in Shadows I

Study time: 2 weeks
Minimum experience level: 1
Prerequisite: none Probability of success: 60%

This ability allows the Thief to move in the shadows with a high probability of escaping detection. When moving in the shadows, the Thief must be alone and may not carry any source of light. Thieves employing this ability to hide from hostile parties have a 60% probability of remaining undetected in any five-minute period.

Hide in Shadows II

Study time: 2 weeks
Minimum experience level: 3
Prerequisite: Hide in Shadows I Probability of success: 90%

This ability is the same as the first-level Hide in Shadows ability except that its probability of success is considerably increased.

Noise Detection I

Study time: 2 weeks
Minimum experience level: 1
Prerequisite: none Probability of success: 50%

Using this ability, Thieves increase their ability to hear all forms of noise. In particular, if there is any noise to be heard behind a door, the Thief will have a 50% chance of detecting the sound, but will generally not be able to make out any words from a conversation. Normal characters will have a 20% chance of detecting such noise.

Noise Detection II

Study time: 2 weeks
Minimum experience level: 3
Prerequisite: Noise Detection I Probability of success: 90%

This further increases the Thief's ability to hear noises so that there is a 90% chance of detecting any noise beyond a door. In some cases, the Thief will also be able to make out bits and pieces of a conversation, if the language used is familiar.

Lockpicking I

Study time: 2 weeks
Minimum experience level: 1
Prerequisite: none Probability of success: 30% on normal locks

This allows the Thief to make an attempt to open locked doors or chests by picking the locks. For normal locks, the Thief has a 30% chance of success. Independently, there is also a 30% chance that the attempt is detected if the lock is on the door of an occupied room. A Thief who fails to pick a particular lock may not try a second time without further study of lockpicking.

Lockpicking II
Study time: 2 weeks
Minimum experience level: 2
Prerequisite: Lockpicking I Probability of success: 50% on normal locks

This is similar to Lockpicking I except that the Thief has a 50% chance of success with normal locks and only a 10% chance of being detected.

Lockpicking III
Study time: 2 weeks
Minimum experience level: 3
Prerequisite: Lockpicking II Probability of success: 80% on normal locks

This is again similar to Lockpicking I with a higher probability.

Climbing
Study time: 2 or more weeks
Minimum experience level: 2
Prerequisite: none Probability of success: (see description)

The mastery of the arts of climbing allow the Thief to climb nearly vertical walls as long as the surface of the wall is rough enough to provide some holds. The probability of success will vary depending upon the surface condition, although the Thief may ask the referee to assess the chance of a successful ascent. A Thief who fails to make the climb successfully also has a 50% chance of falling from some height. For example, if the referee indicated that a Thief had a 60% chance of climbing some wall, the attempt would be successful 60% of the time, be turned back 20% of the time, and result in a fall in the remaining 20% of the cases. Additional study may be applied to the Climbing skill, and the referee will increase the probability of success accordingly.

Trap Detection
Study time: 2 or more weeks
Minimum experience level: 2
Prerequisite: none Probability of success: (see description)

After studying this ability, the Thief will have the ability to detect mechanical traps with a certain probability determined by the referee. Additional study may be used to increase this chance.

Secret Door Detection
Study time: 2 or more weeks
Minimum experience level: 2
Prerequisite: none Probability of success: (see description)

After this study, the Thief will have the ability to detect secret or concealed doors some fraction of the time depending on the length of study and the determination of the referee.

Disguise

Study time: 2 weeks
Minimum experience level: 3
Prerequisite: none

This ability allows the Thief to take on the likeness of anyone of roughly the same height so that no one will be able to detect the disguise by sight alone. Each disguise the Thief uses requires spending a full week preparing the mask and clothing, ruling out any additional study.

Poisons and Antidotes

Study time: 3 weeks
Minimum experience level: 3
Prerequisite: none Probability of success: (see description)

This study prepares the Thief to use poisons and to understand the secrets of herbal remedies and antidotes. Mastering these arts allows the Thief to prepare poisons that are generally fatal if ingested and greatly increase the seriousness of wounds caused by poisoned weapons, although the effects of the poisons known at the time are delayed for as much as several hours. The Thief also learns to prepare antidotes to poisons, which may be effective on wounds of the party. If the Thief has experience using the poison, the antidote will be effective 90% of the time. If the Thief knows the nature of the poison but does not use it, the antidote is successful 50% of the time. If the Thief does not know the nature of the poison, the antidote succeeds in only 20% of the cases.